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ABSTRACT

In 1982, a survey of California community colleges was conducted to determine which standardized tests were being used at entrance to college for matriculation and/or placement and to ascertain how satisfied users were with the instruments. Surveys were sent to administrators or staff involved with entrance and assessment practices at 106 California community colleges, asking them to indicate (1) which instruments were accepted or required for entrance, and which were used for placement into writing, reading, English as a Second Language (ESL), and math programs; and (2) their level of satisfaction with each instrument. Study findings, based on responses from 99 colleges, revealed: (1) general aptitude tests were required at entrance for full-time students by only 20 colleges and were recommended by 19 schools; (2) the American College Test (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) were mentioned more often than any other tests for entrance assessment, though only two of the colleges required ACT scores and only one required SAT scores from applicants; (3) assessment for English placement was required by 56% of the colleges, for reading placement by 32%, for math placement by 25%, and for ESL placement by 20%; and (4) the Comparative Guidance and Placement Test was the most used testing battery and the one with which respondents were most satisfied. (HB)

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TESTS IN USE IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
Standardized Tests Most Used for Placement in English, Reading, ESL, and Math

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Abstract

Respondents to a survey sent to 106 California community colleges in 1982 were asked to identify the major tests used at entrance to college for matriculation and/or placement. They were also asked to evaluate the instruments and to indicate whether students were required or recommended to take them. Of the 99 colleges responding to the survey, fewer than 20% required assessment for matriculation. Assessment for English placement was required by 56%, for reading by 32%, for math by 25%; and only 20% required assessment for English as a Second Language. Locally-developed instruments were more used than any single published instrument in all areas except reading. The best-known standardized tests, the ACT and SAT, were almost never required for any kind of placement assessment. The testing battery that ranked highest was the Comparative Guidance and Placement battery.

TESTS IN USE AT CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
Standardized Tests Most Used for Placement in English, Reading, ESL, and Math

Assessment testing at entrance to community colleges in California has become a topic of major interest throughout the state. Although there is currently no Legislative or Board of Governors requirement that assessment is mandatory, the state may soon follow the lead of such states as New Jersey and Florida (Drakulich, 1980; Luckenbill & McCabe, 1978) in establishing such a requirement. One indication of the level of interest is the study of matriculation models at designated pilot schools being conducted by the community college Board of Governors during 1983-1985. All of the models contain a testing component.

In the strong liklihood that entrance assessment is mandated, a major question will be which instrument or instruments will be used. In the winter of 1982-1983, a survey was sent to all 106 California community colleges to determine which tests were being used for matriculation and/or placement at entrance, and how satisfied the users were with the instruments. Administrators or staff involved with entrance and assessment practices at 99 colleges (93.4%) responded to the questionnaire.

In addition to indicating which instruments were accepted or required at entrance and for placement into writing, reading, English as a second language, and math programs, respondents were asked to indicate a satisfaction level for each instrument from 1 (Very Dissatisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied).

Presented below are the data regarding the use and satisfaction level of the instruments colleges required or accepted for entrance and/or for placement. In all the tables, the number reporting satisfaction scores for each instrument is provided. (This number should be considered when examining satisfaction averages as, in many cases, the total number reporting satisfaction is below 10.) The number of different tests reported will be provided, but only those tests reported more than once will be listed on the tables below.

Background

Assessment at entrance is generally requested for one of two purposes: official matriculation and/or placement. While there may be considerable overlap between the two categories, in general, matriculation instruments tend to be aptitude tests or batteries, usually major examinations with national reputations and norms, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or the American College Test (ACT). In selective admissions

colleges, such tests may be used to determine acceptance; in open-door colleges they may be used as part of the formal application required for a student to become "fully matriculated" as well as to provide general information for counselors.

When matriculation assessment is not required, placement instruments, if used, tend to be narrower, discipline-specific tests, and they often are locally-developed.

Instruments for Matriculation

General aptitude tests at entrance were required for full-time students by only 20 of the 99 colleges responding to the questionnaire, recommended by 19 and not asked for by 55. Thirteen others provided names of tests they would accept. (Percentages will not be used in the discussion when referring to a portion of the 99 responses to the survey, as the number closely approximates the percent. Check tables for additional data.)

Of the instruments named for entrance assessment, the ACT and SAT were mentioned far more often than any other instrument, the ACT by 29 colleges (56.9% of 52 colleges reporting use of such instruments) and the SAT by 27 (52.3%). They were rarely required, however, with the ACT being required at only 2 of the 29 colleges that

named it, and the SAT by only 1 of 27. In general, they were reported as one of a group of tests, any of which would be accepted by the college at entrance. On the satisfaction scale of 1 to 5 (see above), the ACT averaged 3.26 and the SAT, 3.80. Table 1 provides information about all matriculation tests reported by at least four colleges.

Insert Table 1

The next most-mentioned exam, the School and College Ability Test (SCAT) was named by 12 colleges (23.5% of those reporting use of a matriculation instrument). Only 2 of those colleges indicated they required it; satisfaction average was 3.54. The next three instruments named, the Nelson-Denny (NDRT), and Comparative Guidance and Placement battery (CGP), and the Cooperative tests (English, reading, or math), although mentioned less often than SAT, ACT, or SCAT, were more likely to be required. The NDRT, mentioned by 10 colleges and required by 4, had a satisfaction average of 3.48, while the CGP, mentioned by 8 and required by 3, had a 4.69 satisfaction average, the highest of all the instruments. The EPT, an exam developed for use by the California state university system, had a 4.0 rating.

Lowest levels of satisfaction for instruments were the College Board at (2.0) and the Davis and Stanford Diagnostic reading tests (at 2.5 each); the number of users reporting was extremely small, however.

Placement Instruments

English Assessment by Objective Exam

Assessment for placement in English was by far the most common use of placement testing, indicated by 85 colleges. Data show that English assessment by objective exam was required by 55 colleges (64.7 percent of those reporting assessment for English).*Locally developed instruments were used by 18 colleges and required at 13 of these. Second in use was the Cooperative English or Reading (Co-op), with 10 mentions, then the CGP with 9, the NDRT with 8, and the SCAT, TASK (Stanford Test of Academic Skills), and TSWE (Test of Standard Written English), with 6 each.

Of these 6 instruments, plus the local tests, highest satisfaction levels were earned by the CGP and the TSWE, both of which had an average of 4.17; the CGP and the TSWE are also the most recently-developed tests on the list. Local instruments averaged a satisfaction level of 3.99, followed by Co-op at 3.85, the SCAT at

* Sixty four colleges reported some use of a writing sample for English placement; over 40% of these were written in class.

3.70, the TASK at 3.45, and the NDRT at 3.30. The numbers reporting satisfaction, however, except for the users of local tests, were all fewer than 10.

Twelve published instruments were named more than once, and another 12 were named once, for a total of 24 published instruments, in addition to the group catalogued under locally-developed tests. See Table 2 for specific details.

Table 2

Reading Assessment

Seventy-five colleges reported using reading assessment for p'acement, with only 32 (42.7% of users) requiring a test for placement and 43 (57.3% of users) recommending one. However, only eight instruments, other than the locally-developed tests, received more than one mention (16 instruments were named once only, for a total of 24 published instruments). Unlike the other three areas of assessment, for which the most often used test was a locally-developed one, only 5 colleges (6.7% of users) mentioned a local reading test, and satisfaction with local tests, at 3.0, was lower than with published instruments.

The most frequently used instrument for reading

assessment was the NDRT, used by 18 colleges (24.0% of the colleges doing reading assessment) with a satisfaction average of 3.53. Ten colleges required it and 8 recommended it. The next most used tool was the CGP, used by 9 colleges (12.0%) with a satisfaction level of 3.83. Only one user of CGP required it.

Other instruments reported more than once were the Co-op Reading test, with 7 mentions, the Davis with 6, the TASK with 5, the Gates-MacGinitie with 4, the SDRT with 3, and ACT:CPP with 2.

Highest satisfaction level among those instruments was the Gates-MacGinitie with a 4.33 average, and the lowest were the NDRT at 3.53 and the ACT-CPP at 3.0. Reporting rates were very low on all reading instruments except, relatively, for the NDRT. Table 3 provides information about reading assessment.

Table 3

Assessment for Non-Native Speakers of English

Only 52 colleges reported ESL assessment. Only 20 colleges (38.5% of those reporting) required placement testing for ESL. Thirty-two (61.5% of users) recommended it. Locally-developed tests were the most used tool, with 17 colleges (32.7% of users) reporting use of local

instruments, 10 requiring assessment with local tools and 7 recommending. Satisfaction with local tests averaged 3.7.

Only 7 instruments, other than locally-developed ones were named more than once (8 other instruments were named once each, for a total of 15 identified published instruments for ESL). The Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency was reported 9 times (by 17.3%). The Michigan, with a satisfaction average of 4.33, was better liked than the CELT, which had an average of 3.16 and was used by 8 colleges.

The NDRT and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) were each used by 4 schools, but the satisfaction levels, at 2.5 and 2.75, respectively, were low; however, only 2 colleges reported on each test. Other than for locally-developed tests, ESL assessment at entrance appeared to be little required. Table 4 below provides specific information about the tests.

Table 4

Mathematics Assessment

Sixty-seven colleges indicated they used mathematics assessment, with 25 colleges (37.3% of users) requiring such assessment. Only 6 instruments, other than

locally-developed tests, were reported more than once. (Eleven other instruments were each named once, for a total of 17 tests other than the local instruments.)

As with English and ESL assessment, the local instruments were the most frequently used mathematics assessment tools. Twenty-six colleges (38.8% of users) reported a local instrument, with a 3.68 satisfaction average. Ten of these local tests were required; 16 were not.

The SCAT mathematics test was next in user-rate, with 10 colleges reporting its use, half requiring it, and a satisfaction level of 3.69. The CGP, with 9 users, and the Co-op Math, with 8 reporting, were the next highest used instruments. The CGP, with a satisfaction rating of 3.51, appeared more popular, however, than the Co-op Math at 2.99. These instruments tended to be recommended at colleges rather than required. See Table 5 for information about mathematics instruments.

Table 5

Summary of Tests Used for Entrance or Placement

Table 6 summarizes usage and satisfaction levels for the 11 major instruments receiving mention by at least 5 colleges. Six instruments were reported more frequently

than other instruments, when entrance tests and all placement uses were combined. These instruments were, in order: the CGP, with 37 mentions; the NDRT, with 36 mentions; the ACT and Co-op, with 32 mentions each; and the SAT and SCAT, each with 30.

The CGP had the broadest use and the highest satisfaction average of this group. As with the SCAT and Co-op, however, the total number of mentions of the CGP relates partly to the fact that various subtests may be used for placement in different areas. In practice, only 11 different colleges named the CGP, while 18 named the Co-op and the SCAT. The NDRT, which is a single reading test, was named by a total of 22 different colleges. All of the above tests had some multiple use for both matriculation and placement testing.

The ACT and SAT, on the other hand, although they were named by 32 and 30 colleges, respectively, were used almost exclusively for matriculation and then generally only as one of several which were acceptable.

Table 6

Among the six most mentioned instruments, the CGP, at 3.98, had the highest satisfaction average. The SAT, at 3.69, was next, followed by the Co-op at 3.67, the

SCAT at 3.52, the NDRT at 3.46, and the ACT at 3.37. Of all the tests, the ESL test--the Michigan--had the highest level at 4.33, followed by the writing test--the TSWE, at 4.25. Some caution must be used, however, in interpreting satisfaction levels, as in some cases numbers are under 10.

Table 6 summarizes the usage by colleges of each type of test, entrance or placement, so that comparison may be made.

Conclusions and Observations

In general, fewer than half the colleges required an exam for placement, with the exception of English, for which placement exams were required in 55.6% of reporting colleges. Reading exams were required in 32.3%; exams in mathematics in 25.3%; and placement exams for non-native speakers of English in only 20.2%. (See tables for comparisons among the various categories for colleges recommending placement testing.)

Many of the colleges responding to the survey indicated they were not satisfied with their assessment/placement programs and would be, or already were, making major revisions. Reinforcing these concerns, with questions about the matriculation and placement processes, are other groups in the state, such as the Postsecondary Education Commission, the Community

College Chancellor's Office, and even the Legislature.

Recognizing, no doubt, the lack of satisfaction with many of the traditional testing instruments, and the new surge of interest in assessment, as well as the size of the potential market, major test publishers, such as ACT and ETS, have recently developed new instruments for the community college and are now piloting these.

Testing, as most professionals know, is at best tenuous prognostication, but, as testing programs expand, college personnel are being increasingly faced with the need to evaluate and to choose the instruments they will use. There is value in knowing how others users regard the instruments they are considering.

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Table 1

Numbers and Percents of California Community Colleges Reporting Use of Assessment Instruments Accepted at Entrance to Colleges, and Average Satisfaction Level of Each Instrument, Ranked by Total Use, 1982-1983

Test Instrument	Number of Colleges "Require"	Number of Colleges "Will Accept"	Total	% all Colleges Responding (99)	% all Colleges Reporting Use of Matriculation Instruments (51)	Total Number Reporting and Total Average Satisfaction Level*	
1. ACT	2	27	29	29.3	56.9	(N=29)	3.26
2. SAT	1	26	27	27.3	52.3	(N=29)	3.80
3. SCAT	2	10	12	12.1	23.5	(N=11)	3.54
4. NDRT	4	6	10	10.1	19.6	(N=10)	3.48
5. CGP	3	5	8	8.1	15.7	(N=8)	4.69
6. Coop	5	2	7	7.1	13.7	(N=4)	4.00
7. EPT	0	4	4	4.0	7.8	(N=4)	4.25
8. TASK	3	1	4	4.0	7.8	(N=4)	3.25

*Satisfaction level: 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied

N=52 colleges reporting matriculation assessment. Required by 20 (20.2% of all colleges); recommended by 32 (32.3% of all colleges).

Table 2

English Assessment Data for California Community Colleges: Numbers and Percents Using Specific Test Instruments, and Average Satisfaction Levels, Ranked by Total Use, 1982-1983

Test Instrument	Number of Colleges "Require"	Number of Colleges "Recommending"	Total	% all Colleges Responding (99)	% all Colleges Reporting Use of English Instruments (85)	Total Number Reporting and Total Average Satisfaction Level*	
1. Local	13	5	18	18.2	21.2	(N=17)	3.99
2. Coop	9	1	10	10.1	11.8	(N=7)	3.85
3. CGP	4	5	9	9.1	10.6	(N=8)	4.17
4. NDRT	4	4	8	8.1	9.4	(N=6)	3.30
5. SCAT II	4	3	7	6.1	7.1	(N=4)	3.17
6. TSWE	4	2	6	6.1	7.1	(N=6)	4.17
7. TASK	3	3	6	6.1	7.1	(N=5)	3.45
8. ACT	-	3	3	4.0	3.5	(N=2)	4.00
9. ACT:CPP	2	-	2	2.0	2.4	(N=2)	3.00
10. Davis	2	-	2	2.0	2.4	(N=2)	4.00
11. DTLS	2	-	2	2.0	2.4	(N=2)	2.00
12. ITED	2	-	2	2.0	2.4	(N=2)	3.70
13. SAT	1	1	2	2.0	2.4	(N=2)	2.00

*Satisfaction level: 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied

N=85 colleges reporting English assessment (85.9%). Required by 55 (64.7% of 83, 55.6% of total); recommended by 30 (35.3% of 85, 30.3% of total).

Table 3

Reading Assessment Data for California Community Colleges: Numbers and Percents Using Specific Test Instruments, and Average Satisfaction Levels, Ranked by Total Use, 1982-1983

Test Instrument	Number of Colleges "Require"	Number of Colleges "Recommending"	Total	% all Colleges Responding (99)	% all Colleges Reporting Use of Reading Instruments (78)	Total Number Reporting and Total Average Satisfaction Level*	
1. NDRT	10	8	18	18.2	24.0	(N=15)	3.53
2. CGP	1	8	9	9.1	12.0	(N=6)	3.83
3. Coop	4	3	7	7.1	9.3	(N=6)	4.00
4. Davis	4	2	6	6.1	8.0	(N=5)	3.80
5. Local	2	3	5	5.1	6.7	(N=4)	3.00
6. TASK	3	2	5	5.1	6.7	(N=5)	3.80
7. Gates-MacGinitie	2	2	4	4.0	5.3	(N=3)	4.33
8. SDRT	1	2	3	3.0	4.0	(N=3)	4.00
9. ACT:CPP	1	1	2	2.0	2.7	(N=2)	3.00

*Satisfaction level: 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied

N=75 colleges reporting reading assessment (75.8%). Required by 32 (42.7% of users, 32.3% of total); recommended by 43 (57.3% of users,43.4% of total).

Table 4

ESL Assessment Data for California Community Colleges: Numbers and Percents Using Specific Test Instruments, and Average Satisfaction Levels, Ranked by Total Use, 1982-1983

Test Instrument	Number of Colleges "Require"	Number of Colleges "Recommending"	Total	% all Colleges Responding (99)	% all Colleges Reporting Use of ESL Assessment (52)	Total Number Reporting and Total Average Satisfaction Level*	
1. Local	10	7	17	17.3	32.7	(N=14)	3.70
2. Michigan	4	5	9	9.1	17.3	(N=6)	4.33
3. CELT	1	7	8	8.1	15.4	(N=6)	3.17
4. NDRT	-	4	4	4.0	7.7	(N=2)	2.50
5. TOEFL	2	2	4	4.0	7.7	(N=4)	2.75
6. EPT	1	3	4	4.0	7.7	(N=1)	4.0
7. STEL	2	1	3	3.0	5.7	(N=1)	5.0
8. CGP	1	1	2	2.0	3.8	(N=2)	3.0

*Satisfaction level: 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied

N=52 colleges reporting ESL assessment. Required by 20 (38.5% of users, 20.2% of total); recommended by 32 (61.5% of users, 32.3% of total)

Table 5

Mathematics Assessment Data for California Community Colleges: Numbers and Percents Using Specific Test Instruments, and Average Satisfaction Levels, Ranked by Total Use, 1982-1983

	Test Instrument	Number of Colleges "Require"	Number of Colleges "Recommending"	Total	% all Colleges Using (99)	% all Colleges Reporting Use of Mathematics Assessment (67)	Total Number Reporting and Total Average Satisfaction Level*	
1.	Local	10	16	26	26.3	38.8	(N=18)	3.68
2.	SCAT-Math	5	5	10	10.1	14.9	(N=9)	3.69
3.	CGP	2	7	9		12.0	(N=7)	3.51
4.	Coop-Math	3	5	8	8.1	10.7	(N=7)	3.00
5.	College Board	-	2	2	2.0	3.0	(N=2)	3.00
6.	CTBS	2	-	2	2.0	3.0	(N=2)	3.50
7.	DTMS	1	1	2	2.0	3.0	(N=2)	2.50

*Satisfaction level: 1 + very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied

N=67 colleges reporting matematics assessment. Required by 25 (37.3% of users, 25.3% of total), recommended by 42 (62.7% of users, 42.4% of total).

Table 6

California Community College Testing Summary: Most Frequently-Named Published Tests Used for Entrance and Placement, Numbers Using, and Satisfaction Level Averages, Ranked by Total Use, 1982-1983

Instrument	Number Accepting At Entrance	Satisfaction Average	English Placement		Reading Placement		ESL Placement		Mathematics Placement		Total Use	Satisfaction Average
			Number Using	Satisfaction Average	Number Using	Satisfaction Average	Number Using	Satisfaction Average	Number Using	Satisfaction Average		
1. CGP	8	4.69	9	4.17	9	3.83	2	3.00	9	3.51	37	3.98
2. NDRT	10	3.48	8	3.30	18	3.53	-	-	-	-	36	3.46
3. ACT	29	3.26	3	4.00	1	ND*	-	-	-	-	32	3.37
4. Coop	7	4.00	10	3.85	7	4.00	-	-	8	3.00	32	3.67
5. SAT	27	3.80	2	2.00	1	4.00	-	-	-	-	30	3.69
6. SCAT	12	3.54	7	3.17	1	4.00	-	-	10	3.69	30	3.52
7. TASK	4	3.25	6	3.45	5	3.80	-	-	1	3.00	16	3.48
8. Davis	2	2.50	2	4.00	6	3.80	-	-	-	-	10	3.58
9. TSWE	1	4.00	6	4.17	1	5.00	-	-	-	-	8	4.25
10. CELT	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	3.17	-	-	6	3.17
11. Michigan	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	4.32	-	-	6	4.33

Satisfaction Level: 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied

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